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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WELLINGTON 000141

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STATE FOR EAP/FO AND EAP/ANP

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Classified By: DCM David J. Keegan,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. PM Clark strongly supports the timeline and processes recently discussed by Australian, New Zealand, and US officials to encourage Fiji's return to democracy. The GNZ believes that the upcoming Pacific Island Forum (PIF) Eminent Person's Group report on Fiji will be key to determining whether the PIF can place constructive pressure on Fiji's interim government to improve its human rights record and accept a timeline for new elections. The EPG's draft report is apparently quite firm, but NZ officials are concerned it may be toned down by senior PNG and Vanuatu leaders reluctant to erode Melanesian solidarity. The GNZ also continues to monitor the Solomon Islands with concern, and believes the GOSI's dispute with the Regional Assistance Mission (RAMSI) may be at a critical point. NZ officials worry that the simultaneous conflicts in the Solomons and Fiji may overwhelm the PIF and break down unity within the group. End Summary

12. (C) PM Clark is fully on board with the approach to Fiji endorsed by U.S., Australian, and NZ officials during their recent meetings in Hawaii, Deputy Foreign Secretary Alan Williams told DCM and Pol-Econ Couns on February 12. Williams said the PM intends to retain NZ's sanctions (ref C) until Fiji's interim agrees to a specific timetable for a return to elections. At that point, the GNZ will review whether to loosen up sanctions as well as consider electoral and other possible assistance.

EPG Delivers Firm Message

13. (C) The DCM noted that even with a timetable for elections, it will be hard to make real progress without an improvement in Fiji's human rights situation. Williams agreed, noting that the upcoming Pacific Island Forum (PIF) Eminent Persons Group report to PIF Foreign Ministers will play a key role in determining whether the group will place effective pressure on PM Bainimarama and his appointees. The GNZ has heard that the draft report does in fact deliver a united, firm message on what Fiji needs to do to return to democracy. It calls for a suspension of the state of emergency, a return of the military to the barracks, the appointment of a civilian PM before the elections, and a credible date to be set for elections within 15-24 months. Williams attributed the strong message to the fact that that the PNG and Vanuatu EPG members were reportedly even more shocked than others in the group by the strong climate of

fear they found in post-Coup Fiji. They apparently feel the Fijian Foreign Minister misled the December meeting of the Melanesian Spearhead group, which came out in solidarity with Fiji. (Using a Kiwi expression we had not heard before, Williams said that they felt they had been "sold a pup.") But Williams acknowledged that EPG's draft may be softened if senior PNG and Vanuatu leaders believe the report is too detrimental to Melanesian Spearhead Group unity.

¶4. (C) Williams said that Bainimarama appeared very confident when he met with the EPG. The Commodore put a statement into the EPG report noting it will be at least five years before Fiji can hold elections, and all sanctions must be removed before any balloting takes place. Figuring out "how to get rid of Frank" will be key to resolving the situation in Fiji, Williams said. Although Bainimarama claims Fiji needs at least five years to drive out corruption before elections can be held, in reality he is focused on keeping out of jail. Fiji's statute of limitations run between three and five years, so Bainimarama will not be keen to hold elections within two years unless he has some guarantee of immunity. On the other hand, a united PIF front, coupled with Fiji's desire to be back in the fold and the unfreezing of assistance, could break the impasse. For this reason, Williams said, we should maintain pressure to get Fiji to agree to the timeline and processes discussed in Hawaii.

Possible NZ Assistance to Fiji Democracy Building

¶5. (C) Michael Green, NZ's High Commissioner in Suva, was in Wellington last week and met with PM Clark and Williams.

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Green pointed out that there has not been a robust census in Fiji for at least 12-13 years. If the interim Fiji government agrees to a timeline, Williams said one useful form of assistance might be to do a new census and advise on a new seat allocation for Parliament. Over the longer term, it might also be helpful to provide advice on reform of Fiji's constitution, which currently enforces a multi-party system without mandating any inter-party negotiation. This has increased internal conflicts and undermined public faith in government.

Critical Juncture in Solomons

¶6. (C) Williams said that New Zealand continues to monitor the Solomon Islands with concern, as events there -- notably the GOSI's opposition to RAMSI -- may be reaching a critical juncture. Simultaneous pressures from events in Fiji and the Solomons could undermine PIF coherence, he added. Williams passed along "fulsome thanks" to EAP DAS Davies for having stressed to PM Sogavare that it is critical that the GOSI continue to cooperate with RAMSI. Williams added that while NZ has been a bit more light-handed publicly in its approach to the GOSI than has Australia, they understood why Foreign Minister Downer felt he had no other choice but to speak out openly. FM Peters prefers to deliver his strong messages to GOSI behind closed doors, but he and other Kiwi officials have been coordinating exceptionally closely with their Australian counterparts. Now that both the Acting Police Commissioner and his Deputy are Kiwis, New Zealand may find itself forced to express its concerns more directly from now on, Williams added.

McCormick